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ABSTRACT

In order to determine whether an alternative teaching strategy would improve student motivation in freshman composition, two sections of freshman composition were studied. The experimental group spent the majority of a term concentrating on individualized projects which were chosen, planned, carried out, and presented by each student. Students worked in small groups with the teacher in the role of motivator (through individual feedback) and resource person. The control group received traditional instruction with regular reading and essay assignments. Both groups took pre- and post-tests in writing mechanics, essay writing, and attitudes towards communication. Attrition, attendance, grade, and course and teacher evaluations were compared between groups. The experimental group began with 33 students; of the 28 completers, 10 received A's, 13 B's, and 5 C's. The control class began with 37 students; of the 30 completers, 10 received A's, 8 B's, and 12 C's. Both groups showed similar improvement in attitude, mechanics, coherence, and use of supporting detail, transitional devices, and logic. The experimental group showed a greater improvement in fluency and had one-third fewer absences. Evaluation instruments are appended. (TR)

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MOTIVATION THROUGH INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS IN FRESHMAN COMPOSITION

by

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ABSTRACT

Motivation is almost always a problem in institutional education. It is an especially serious problem in required English composition courses at open access colleges like Miami-Dade Community College. The purpose of this study was to use an alternative teaching strategy to improve student motivation in freshman composition.

Two sections of freshman composition were used for this study. The treatment group spent the entire term on individualized student projects which were chosen, planned, carried out, and presented by each student. The students used Project Check Sheets for planning, working frequently in small groups, with the teacher in the role of motivator (through individual feedback) and resource person. The control group was taught in a traditional manner with regular reading and essay assignments. Both groups were given pre- and post-tests in mechanics, essay writing, and attitude toward communication. The attrition, attendance, grades, and course and teacher evaluations of the two groups were also compared.

The two groups showed similar improvement in attitude toward communication, mechanics, coherence, use of transitional devices, supporting details, and logic. Grades and course and teacher evaluations in the two groups were similar. The treatment group showed a twenty percent greater improvement in fluency and had only about one-third as many absences per student as the control group. The treatment group students completed twenty-eight successful projects and wrote positive responses to a self-evaluation asking how they felt about their projects. The teacher was able to spend more time with individual students because of

the individualization and because the students helped each other. Students were able to write more and the teacher was able to spend less time on grading than in the control group.

The use of individualized projects was recommended as a result of this study. However, composition courses could use them in conjunction with other methods, or use whichever aspects of this approach fit the teacher's personal style. Most of all individualization was recommended as a way of motivating student learning.

INTRODUCTION

Lack of motivation is one of the most serious problems of post secondary education, especially in the community college. The open-access model, low tuition, V. A. benefits, financial aid, and the general trend toward college for all, have brought many young people into the community college who are not motivated to learn in the traditional academic ways. Many of them admit to being in college because the accompanying financial aid is the only source of income they could find. Some of them know they must have at least a two-year degree for the job they want, but they are totally disinterested in the general education courses required for the degree. Most of them have been told again and again that a college education will increase their chances in the job market and improve their earning capacity. Such delayed and possibly non-existent gratification is not adequate motivation for two years of academic labor, especially for students who have never done well in school in the past.

Motivation is a problem at Miami-Dade Community College, North Campus. Like most community colleges, Miami-Dade has a problem with high attrition. The students register and then withdraw after the first week of class, or they never actually withdraw but just disappear, or they keep coming to class but never complete any work. One of the main reasons for all of these behaviors is lack of motivation. The most commonly heard complaints of teachers about students are, "They just don't care." "They won't do any work." "Nothing interests them." Meanwhile students are saying, "I tried, but it was just too hard." "It was the same thing I had in high school." "It's just nothing that I'm interested in."

The problem of motivation is especially serious in the English Department where two terms of composition courses are required for all students. At Miami-Dade, the students required to take composition range from the straight-A pre-professional genius who would already be at Harvard except for an illness in the family and who can write much better than the teacher, to the high school dropout who doesn't know the alphabet and can't write a sentence. This wide range of ability creates further motivation problems. The students with high academic ability may be bored and feel they should get an A for being alive. The students at the lower end of the scale may be hopelessly frustrated and drop out.

This Practicum was concerned with the specific problem of lack of motivation in freshman composition classes as evidenced by poor class evaluations, low achievement, high attrition, and poor attendance. The purpose of this Practicum was to use an alternate teaching method which was designed to improve motivation through individualized learning. The primary focus of this alternate method was the use of term-long individual student projects which were chosen, planned, carried out, and evaluated by the individual students and by their peers in small groups.

The treatment group spent the majority of the term working on individual projects. Class work was related to various stages of work on the projects such as choosing and narrowing a topic, determining an audience and a purpose, using a variety of resources for information, organizing ideas and selecting supporting details, introductions and conclusions, revising, and evaluating. At every step of the way students shared their projects with the

members of their small group of three to five peers. Although the projects ranged from formal research papers to television scripts to movies and slide/tape shows, the problems encountered and the principles learned were similar. The final weeks of the term were spent in presentation and evaluation of projects.

A control group taught by methods most typical for English composition classes at Miami-Dade (standard text, standard 500-word theme approach, lecture and class discussion method, etc.) was used for comparison with the treatment group. Both classes were taught by the Practicum author. Both were given pre-and post-tests in mechanics, communications attitude, and essay writing. The attrition, attendance and course and instructor evaluations from the two classes were also compared.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Most currently accepted definitions of learning stress behavior more than knowledge. A Cohen (1969:7) calls learning "the changed capacity for, or tendency toward, acting in particular ways." G. R. Lefrancois (1972:8) says "learning comprises all changes in behavior that are due to experience." W. R. O'Connell, Jr., and W. E. Mooman (1975:7) stress that "learning outcomes embraced by the notion of competence have to include more than pure knowledge...Knowledge, plus skills, plus attitudes." This emphasis on behavior and attitude change in definitions of learning would seem to make motivation one of the most important functions of the teacher. In order for learning/behavior change to take place, motivation is necessary. Learning theory is concerned, not only with how people learn, but with why they learn, and this is the core of the motivation.

Motivation has been a consideration of education since the first time anyone tried to teach someone who did not have a prior and stronger urge to learn. This situation seems to be predominant in colleges now. A high degree of motivation was once a prerequisite for combatting the financial and academic blocks to entering college. Now, as J. W. Gardner (1961:3) says, we must consider "...the presence in our colleges of large numbers of boys and girls who really'couldn't care less'about higher education but are there because it's the thing to do." Gardner sees the education of the unmotivated as being arduous and expensive and requiring new approaches to education in curriculum and teaching methods.

The problem of motivation is particularly acute in community colleges. They are located so that students are within commuting distance. The tuition is low, with financial aid and tuition waivers easily available. Open access, regardless of past academic records, is the general rule. All of these characteristics are admirable if the community colleges can meet the needs of the students who come to college under these circumstances. If unmotivated students find it easy to enter college but they are still not motivated to complete course work successfully, the "open door" becomes what many educators have called a "revolving door."

Among characteristics of low-achieving students at community colleges, J. E. Roueche (1968:12) lists, "are weakly motivated, lacking home encouragement to continue in school." The other characteristics of these students will also contribute to lack of motivation. Most of them got low grades in high school so they are not motivated to expect to do better. They are deficient in basic skills, have poor study habits and unrealistic goals, and are from homes with little cultural advantage and no previous experience of what college is like (Roueche, 1968:12-13).

K. P. Cross (1971:27) reports that administrators of remedial services in two-year colleges ranked "lack of effort, has quit trying" first as the major obstacle to learning for low-achieving students. Cross also lists behaviors of what she calls New Students (those who have difficulties academically) which indicate their lack of motivation:

> They drop out of our traditional schools; they quit listening to lectures; they fail to put forth their best effort; they score low on conventional

> tests designed to reflect the heart of the traditional academic curriculum; they get low marks for their school performance; their interests, leisure-time activities, and hobbies are 'non-academic'; they fail to develop self-confidence; and they tell us they are nervous and tense in class. (p. 156)

If motivation is a serious problem for all educators, and particularly for those in community colleges, it is multiplied even more for teachers of writing. Since writing is a skill, rather than a separate content area, it is useful and necessary for all students. Yet, it is likely to be an area where students are deficient in basic skills (one of the major factors in low achievement reported by Cross). In a talk on "Problems in Teaching Functional Writing" given to a Communications Seminar for the Society for Technical Communications, Professor E. P. J. Corbett (1975:17) stressed the lack of motivation among students to learn writing. He considered writing courses unpopular among students because they are required and because writing is hard work. Professor Corbett was not alone in his concern; almost every panel at this seminar discussed motivation as one of the most serious problems of teaching writing.

Most of the writers who bring up the problem of motivation have at least a few suggestions toward a solution. Roueche and Mink in their booklet Improving Student Motivation (1976) state that the challenge to community college instructors is

> to aid these students ['high risk' students with a history of failure and little sense of control in their lives] in the expectation of succeeding rather than failing and in the realization of control in their lives. (p. 1)

The heart of Roueche and Mink's method for helping students realize they can control their own lives is W. Glasser's Reality Therapy (New York: Harper and Row, 1965). In using reality therapy to achieve an internal locus of control in a classroom situation, Roueche and Mink (1976) offer these suggestions (p. 17): individualized learner-oriented instruction, getting commitment to specific action from the student, clear behavioral objectives furnished to the student, student self-assessment and self-evaluation. All of these suggestions are meant to put learning in the student's control.

Roueche also insists on the importance of individualized instruction in A Modest Proposal: Students Can Learn(1972) and gives specific examples of behavioral objectives, pretesting, learning experiences, and evaluation which would constitute an individualized approach to instruction. Cross (1976) makes a strong case for individualized learning as a way of motivating students and gives these characteristics of individualized instruction: The student must be active; the goals of learning must be clear and explicit; lesson units or modules should be small and deal with a single concept; students should be reinforced through feedback and evaluation; and students should be able to space their learning (pp. 52-54).

Hilbert (1973) has experimented with individualized instruction specifically in English and sees it, not simply as helpful in motivating students, but as absolutely essential because of the wide range of writing needs and abilities among students. This is very likely true in many areas, but in English it is a certainty. Ernestine Cole (1976) of the

Miami-Dade reading department reported to a group of English faculty that they could expect an eight grade range in reading and writing ability in all classes. This much variation would indicate clearly that the same instruction and assignment will not work for all the students in an English composition class.

Given the need for individualizing learning, the next question becomes how to go about it. Cross (1976) says, "It would be ideal if each student could design a learning task of his own choosing, but realistically it is desirable to develop a number of tasks very carefully and let the student choose which task he will undertake." (p. 171) Perhaps each student could design a learning task of his or her own choosing if a realistic and careful plan for the design were developed by the instructor. If the learning objectives were clearly stated, and if the steps in the design were small and exact, and if the objectives and the steps were the same regardless of the learning task chosen by the student, this ideal of individual choice could be realistic. An individual project developed according to a specific plan could fulfill these requirements.

The values of a wide range of possible projects can be seen from several viewpoints. If students are urged to choose projects which are interesting and meaningful to them and which will be useful to them in terms of future college work, career or enjoyment of life, the projects will be more than just an assignment to finish. Landreman (1972:395) emphasizes the importance of giving students in composition classes writing assignment that relate to their major area of study. Slatnick

(1973:1253), in discussing implications of the national assessment of Educational Progress, reports that the best student writing takes real communication needs into account. There is a call here for realism which goes beyond the traditional 500-word theme. Essays by educators in Let the Entire Community Become Our University stress the value of a project or field assignment approach to education. D. A. Raymond, in one of these essays gives three advantages to such learning experiences:

> 1. To promote the educational development of the student in relation to his particular needs and interests;
> 2. to encourage the practical or 'real life' application of his knowledge and skills; and
> 3. to bridge the gap between academic pursuits and responsibility to the needs of society.
>
> (Ritterbush, ed. 1972:73)

Still another possibility for a wide-range project assignment is suggested by Estrin (1973) who advocates motivating students by making assignments which allow them to work on their personal problems. If students felt that what they were writing might help solve their own problems and/or accomplish something for someone else, this could be a powerful motivator.

Holt (1969:107) says that most academic writing instruction is "largely training in bull-slinging and snow-jobbery." He estimates that over 95 percent of the time, student writers don't care about and have no honest opionion of what they are writing, have no desire to keep what they write, and would not write if they didn't have to do so. He feels that students will care about their writing only when they have an audience that cares what they say.

The importance of an audience and a purpose is often neglected in composition classes. This can lead to problems with evaluating writing because a paper that might be appropriate and effective with one audience and purpose in mind, could be out of place and useless for a different audience and purpose. In addition to improving composition evaluation accuracy, writing for an audience is a good motivator for a student with at least an average amount of entertainer/teacher/crusader in him or her.

The audience in writing seems to have been rediscovered recently. Landreman (1972:389) discusses the need for keeping an audience in mind in scientific writing as well as in creative writing. Voilker (1973:11) uses the mass media as an example of effective writing for an audience. The Society for Technical Communication (1975:30) stresses the importance of writing for an audience in business, industry, and government. Stevenson (1976:176,177) actually finds real audiences for his students: students in another class, professors in other fields, publications, and the community in which the student lives or works. Gassen (1975:25) urges "a sense of audience and commitment" in the introductory paragraph to motivate the rest of the paper.

Closely related to the sense of audience is a sense of purpose. Milton (1973:123) describes a study in which two groups of journalism students were given special assignments. Group A was told that their work was being used in a publication. Group B was assigned a term paper. Group A spent twice as much time on the special assignment as Group B,

and three professional newsmen who read all the papers judged Group A papers as near professional and Group B papers as poor quality. Milton is convinced this was because Group A felt their work had a purpose so they were motivated to do well.

To give a sense of audience and purpose on individual projects, a plan or contract is useful. The reality therapy used by Roueche and Mink (1976:39) to motivate students includes personal involvement between helper and students, focus on behavior, payoff, value judgment, planning, and follow-up and preplanning. In the planning stage the student is asked to say specifically what he or she will do. This commitment to a plan helps the student feel in control of the learning situation and more likely to follow through on the plan. Zwerling (1976:190-198) describes the use of "plans" to motivate students at Staten Island Community College. He had students write their goals, the amount of time to reach their goals, and the specific steps they would take to reach their goals. Discussing their plans in a group, they got valuable feedback from peers and the group leader which helped them revise their plans or to see why their behavior would not help them reach their goals. Students were strongly motivated by having a plan to follow which they had constructed based on their own abilities and needs.

In using individualized projects in the classroom, the plan or project check sheet can serve several valuable functions. The students must commit themselves in writing to a particular topic and a particular thesis statement. The sense of commitment defined by Roueche and Mink (1976:30)

applies here. The commitment in reality therapy has two premises:

> (a) honesty, which refers to the constant sharing with the appropriate person or persons all pertinent, relevant and meaningful facts, and (b) responsibility and objectives, or a state of willingness to make commitments to...goals and to live up to these commitments.

Another function of the check sheet is to provide an early and continuing sense of audience and purpose as these must be determined before the project begins. The check sheet also serves as a plan by asking for sources of information and an organizational pattern.

Although the use of individual projects planned with the use of a project check sheet is the focus of this motivational strategy, the role of the teacher should not be neglected. As Eble states in Professors as Teachers (1973:177),

> I think college teachers who find the profession most rewarding in the years ahead may be those who see themselves as agents for learning, catalysts for students' development. Such teachers will regard motivation as their primary responsibility, and will push themselves and their institutions for means through which motivated students can further their learning.

Roueche (1972:24) also sees the teacher in the role of a motivator who gives positive reinforcement to successful learning experiences, "a manager of learning, not a dispenser of information." Roueche sees this "manager of learning" helping students in specific ways that are especially relevant to the individualized project approach. The teacher should "see that resources are available and that the learner is capable of using them." (p.25)

Another aspect of the teacher's role in motivating students is described by Gardner (1961:96) when he says,

> ...the degree of motivation which an individual possesses at any given time is very much affected by what is expected (or demanded) of him.

Cross (1971:169) also sees the teachers' expectations as an important part of student motivation. She emphasizes that fear of failure is a threat to motivation but teachers must not let that put them in the position of spoon-feeding students over-easy assignments from which they learn nothing. If teachers believe students can learn and help students take risks in tackling tasks that are always a little more difficult than what the students have already accomplished, this will provide the challenge which can motivate learning.

One final aspect of the individualized project which can improve motivation should be mentioned, and that is the role of the student's peers in the class. Individual projects stress individual learning, of course, but students are also encouraged to give each other feedback at every stage of the projects. This provides a continuous audience during the planning, producing and presenting of the projects.

Much current enducational experimentation supports the value of a peer audience and peers working together in classes. Fader (1976:27) sees this as the only way to cope with large class sizes and problems of teaching literacy. He uses a kind of three-person buddy system in his classes, based on the old one-room country school methods of coping

with large numbers and a wide range of ability. He claims great positive results from having students help each other. Roueche and Mink (1976:16) and Zwerling (1976:191) report on the supportive comments and constructive feedback which can be offered by peers. Milton (1973:75) mentions several advantages of students teaching students: they will prepare more thoroughly so they won't be embarrassed by their peers; and they feel freer to ask questions of each other that they might not ask the instructor. Cross (1971:166) sees "buddy tutoring" as being a learning advantage to both the tutor and the tutee. Jerabek and Dieterich (1975:185) report on a 1972 study by J. R. Lagana in which Lagana concludes that peer evaluation is at least as effective as teacher evaluation with the added advantages of cutting the teacher's paper-grading time, while giving the students more writing practice and more feedback about their writing.

The method of individualized projects, using a project check sheet, with the instructor in the role of manager of learning and much peer feedback, has many motivational features. The project approach also fulfills Edward L. Thordike's "law of belongingness" which recognizes an organizational principle stating that "connections are easier to learn if the response belongs to the situation." (Hilgard and Bower, 1966) In other words, it is easier to learn material that is related and has a pattern. In the project method, everything in the course is related to individual projects and the fulfillment of purposes determined at the beginning of the course.

When students take the responsibility for determining the subject and

content of their projects and setting up a plan for carrying them out, learning becomes individualized and self-paced. When they have an audience and a purpose and supportive feedback from instructor and peers, their writing has a reason for being. When they determine their learning according to their own interests and needs, their commitment is higher. These were the premises on which this practicum was based with the intent of improving student motivation.

PROCEDURES

Two sections* of freshman composition (ENG 120) were used for this Practicum, one as a treatment group and the other as a control group. Both classes were morning sections taught by the Practicum author. This limited differences in results which could be caused by different instructors. Since a class population is determined by registration procedures, it was not possible to use randomly selected groups. However, the fact that the two groups were both morning classes would tend to make them more alike than if an afternoon or evening class had been used for one group.

The first step of this Practicum was the administration of pre-tests to both classes. All pre-testing was done in the first week of the term by the Practicum author. Both classes were given the diagnostic mechanics test from Help Yourself (See Appendix A) the Goodman Communications Attitude Questionnaire (See Appendix B). and an in-class essay (See Appendix C) which was checked for items which could be measured with as much objectivity as possible. These items were: coherence through a clear central idea, use of specific supporting detail, transitional devices, fluency, mechanical errors, and obvious logical fallacies. The pre-testing served several purposes: it provided several methods of measuring the similarity of the two groups at the beginning of the term; it served as diagnostic assessment to see where individual students were and what they needed; and it represented a base against which progress could be measured.

*Throughout the procedures, the terms "section", "group", and "class" are used more or less interchangeably.

Following the pre-tests, the major portion of the Practicum was involved with the methods and strategies used in the two classes. The control group was taught in a manner which was a typical composite of ENG 120 classes, according to interviews with faculty members and examination of their course packages. The control group used as a text Worlds in the Making (Dunstan and Garland, Prentice-Hall, 1970) and read and discussed selections from this text regularly. Although many different texts are used by the English Department, this has been one of the most popular. The control group watched and discussed the movies which the Audio-Visual Department reported as being most used by English teachers. They wrote six 500-word themes as homework (an average number of such assignments) and were graded according to a grading standards sheet used by the majority of the English Department (see Appendix D).

The treatment group spent the majority of the term on individual projects. In the beginning of the term the class went over each item on the Project Check Sheet (see Appendix E) to make sure that everyone understood the objectives of the assignment and the terminology used. The Project Check Sheet also served a valuable function as a learning plan and a contract which provided a commitment to complete the project. The students were told that their grade would be determined by conference and based on class participation and the individual project (as evaluated by peers, instructor and self, according to the Project Check Sheet). They were also told that the projects had to involve writing in some stage, though not necessarily in the finished product. They were encouraged

to choose a topic early and stay with it through completion. However, anyone with a sound reason could change topics within the first quarter of the term, and almost everyone changed the answers to some questions on the Project Check Sheet. This was treated as positive because it indicated flexible responses to new information and changing situations. The first weeks of the class were spent in choosing topics and planning. Class work focused on decision-making processes, finding the central idea in a variety of communication situations, determining purpose and audience, and relating projects to future career plans and other life goals. Students were urged to choose projects which would be personally interesting to them and also useful in terms of other college work or jobs they hoped to have.

As the treatment group began to work on their projects, class activities centered around learning how and where to find appropriate information. This included learning to use all areas of the library and audio-visual resources, reference materials such as dictionaries, and interviewing techniques, as well as critical appraisal of mass media. The students worked in small groups frequently so that they got constant practical aid and feedback from each other as well as from the instructor.

When the projects were well under way and most students had a rough draft or at least an outline, class work concentrated on organizational patterns, logical thinking, ways of accomplishing the predetermined purposes, introductions and conclusions, and revision. During this time, which was approximately half the term, students did most of the actual project writing (and whatever other major activities were necessary in

the case of projects which involved photography, recording, or other media). They also did a lot of in-class writing as each major point was covered. For instance, they wrote practice introductions and discussed their effectiveness, completed transition and coherence exercises, worked on making abstract sentences more concrete, and revised and edited their own and each other's writing.

Near the end of the term, the projects were presented in class. After presentation of a project, the student discussed the stages of the project, any setbacks or discouragements, sources of information, and final feelings about the project. The class was encouraged to ask critical questions after each presentation and to write evaluative comments which were given to the presenter.

The final step of the Practicum was to administer post-tests and make comparisons. Again, both the treatment group and the control group were given a mechanics test, an in-class essay, and the Goodman Communications Attitude Questionnaire. John Scerba of the Miami-Dade Testing Department administered the English section of the Florida Twelfth Grade Placement Test and W. J. McKeachie's "Student Opinion of Teaching and Course" evaluation instrument (see Appendix F) to both groups. The Florida Twelfth Grade Placement Test was not part of the proposal for this Practicum, but was added as an additional final comparison of the two classes because of its validity and reliability. The teacher and course evaluation was administered by Scerba, with his assurance that the forms would be processed anonymously, to assure frankness of response.

The pre- and post-test scores (on the mechanics test, the in-class essay, and the Goodman Communications Attitude Questionnaire), the Florida Twelfth Grade Placement Test scores, the "Student Opinion of Teaching and Course" scores, the attendance records, and the attrition were compared for the treatment group and the control group. In comparing these scores and records, the Practicum author attempted to discover (a) whether the treatment group did as well as the control group on mechanics and reading comprehension (as shown by the Florida Twelfth Grade Placement Test) even though they were not given formal mechanics lessons or specific reading assignments as the control group was, (b) whether the treatment group would do as well on an in-class essay even though they had not been writing essays, and (c) whether the individualized student projects would increase motivation as reflected by higher scores on the Communications Attitude Questionnaire and the teacher and course evaluation, and lower attrition and better attendance. Grades were compared as a point of interest, and because D's and F's are considered as attrition. However, since the basis for grading was not the same, it is difficult to attach any significance to the comparison. Both sections were graded partially on class participation but not on attendance, per se.

RESULTS

The treatment group class had thirty-three students on the roll at the beginning of the term. Three students never attended class at all, even in the first week. Two students stopped attending class after the first week although they never formally dropped the course. The remaining twenty-eight students completed the course sucsessfully with ten A's, thirteen B's, and five C's. The average number of absences per student was 1.3 for the term. The control group class had thirty-seven students on the roll at the beginning of the term. Three students never attended class at all. Two students asked for I's (incompletes) because they were absent so much. Two students got F's because they did not turn in papers. Of the remaining thirty students, there were ten A's, eight B's, and twelve C's. The average number of absences per student was 4.1 for the term. In summary, there was no significant difference in grades or attrition, but the treatment group had fewer absences.

On the Goodman Communications Attitude Questionnaire, the highest (most positive attitude) possible score was 100. The treatment group had a pre-test mean score of 73.6 and a post-test mean score of 79.5. The control group had a pre-test mean score of 71.7 and a post-test mean score of 74.0. This indicates more improvement in the attitude of the treatment group but it is not statistically significant.

The Help Yourself diagnostic mechanics test given at the beginning of the term had a possible 200 points. The average number missed by the treatment group was 71 and the average missed by the control group was 74.

At the end of the term, the average number missed by the treatment group was 59 and the average missed by the control group was 62. The average raw score of the treatment group on the English section of the Florida Twelfth Grade Placement Test was 45 (47th percentile) and the average raw score of the control group was 46 (50th percentile). The treatment group did slightly better on the mechanics test and the control group did slightly better on the Florida Twelfth Grade Placement Test. However, these differences are not statistically significant.

On the in-class essay written by both the treatment and control groups at the beginning of the course (See Table 1), the average number of words for both classes was about 75. Almost every paper had a central idea though about one-third of the papers in each class had at least one sentence with little or no relationship to the central idea. Seven of the papers in the treatment group had specific details to support the main idea and ten of the papers in the control group had specific details. About one-fourth of the students in each section used adequate transitional devices. The average number of mechanical errors was ten per student in both classes. Three students in the treatment group and five in the control group had obvious logical fallacies.

On the in-class essay written by both groups at the end of the term (see Table 2), the average number of words per essay for the treatment group was 250 and the average number of words for the control group was 200. All but one student (in the control group) followed a central

idea. Twenty-five of the papers in the treatment group and twenty in the control group had specific supporting details. Almost all students used transitional devices adequately. The average number of errors was still near 10 in both classes though it should be remembered that they wrote more than twice as much as they did on papers at the beginning of the term. One student in the treatment group and three students in the control group had obvious logical fallacies.

TABLE ONE - PRE-TEST RESULTS

Number of papers meeting a minimum competency level.

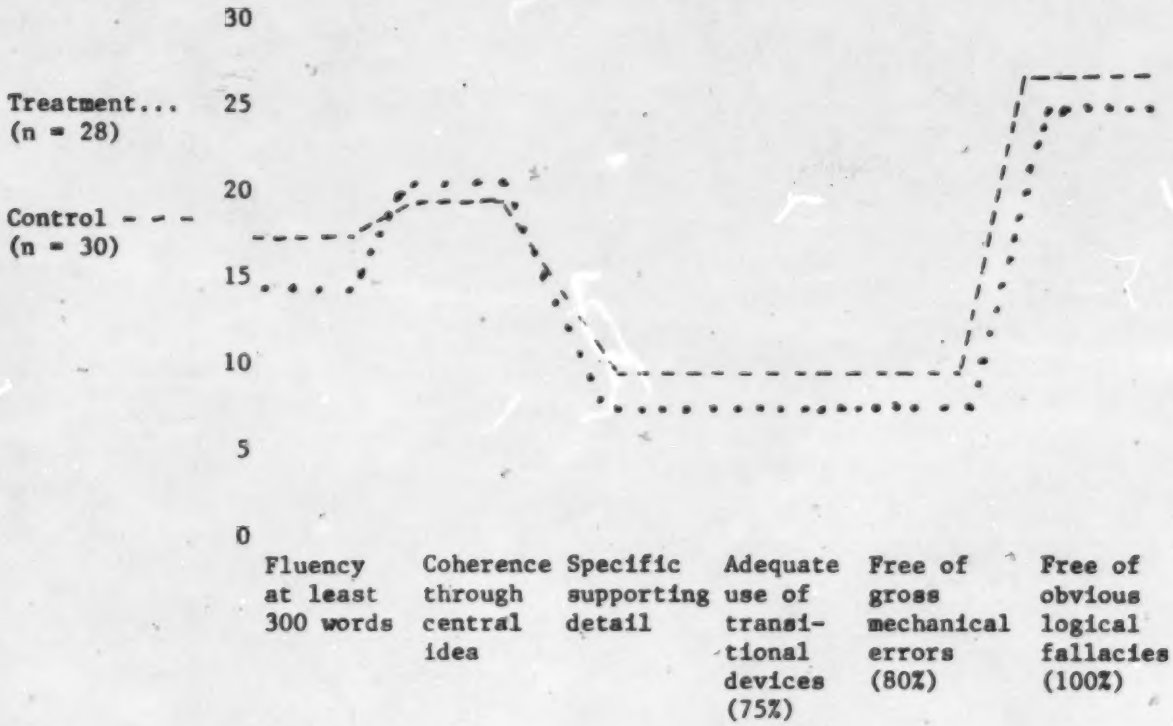
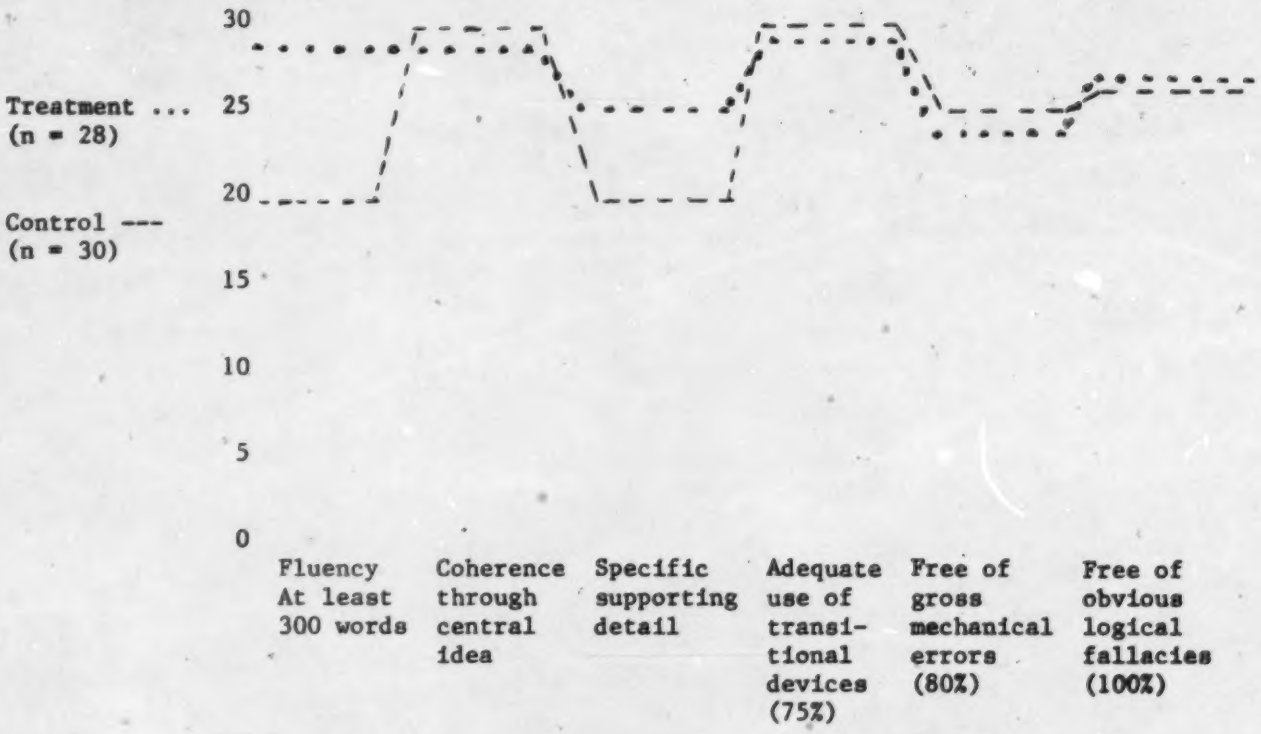


TABLE TWO - POST-TEST RESULTS

Number of papers meeting a minimum competency level.



The "Student Opinion of Teaching and Course" evaluation instrument showed almost no difference between the groups. Out of a possible total score of 80 for instructor and 35 for course, the control group had a mean score of 71 for instructor and 29 for course, and the treatment group had a mean score of 72 for instructor and 27 for course.

Another result of the individual student projects is shown by students' self-evaluation responses to the general question "How do you feel about

your project?" (See Appendix G) These responses were generally positive and will be commented on further in the Recommendations section.

One final result of this Practicum was the completion of twenty-eight projects which included the following:

A research paper on accents and dialects with an accompanying tape, recorded by the student to illustrate points in the paper; a paper on the advantages of nursery schools with an accompanying slide/tape show of children in nursery schools; a script for a "Star Trek" show which was presented with a discussion of how it would be filmed for T. V.; an animated film portraying poetry written by the student producer of the film (the A. V. Department televized this film for use as a model of animation techniques); a slide/tape presentation on jazz; a slide/tape show of ads for a variety of imaginary products accompanied by a discussion of the art of advertising; a research paper on lights, mirrors and reflection presented with a live mirror show by the pools around the art building; a survey of hospital-related occupations in Miami (while interviewing a hospital administrator for his project, the student was offered a job at the hospital); a travelogue-style report, with accompanying slides, on the art in the Vatican; a slide/tape presentation on Jai-Alai; a journal on how writing songs is related to one's life with literary analysis of songs written by the student presented with a live performance; a movie portraying movie camera techniques used for humor; a research paper on the prevention of heart attacks accompanied by demonstrations of how to take blood pressure and do exercises for the heart; a slide/tape

presentation of how love is presented in the mass media. In brief, the topics and methods of presentation were as varied as the students who did them.

The presentations were a learning experience in terms of both form and content. All projects involved at least as much writing as students did in the control group, plus whatever other forms of communication were used in the projects. The students in the treatment group also wrote in class more frequently than the control group did. In spite of this, the teacher spent less time on out-of-class paper grading because the treatment group did more self and peer evaluation and revision.

Overall, the treatment group did as well as the control group in all areas and better in fluency and attendance. They did more writing but required less teacher grading time.

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In education, it is frequently difficult to tell which materials, strategies, policies, courses, etc., make a difference because of the impossibility of controlling the whole learning situation. The college is not the student's whole life. English composition is not the student's whole school experience. The teaching strategies are not the whole composition course. In addition to all of the variables in students' lives which may affect their learning, the students themselves are individuals with different learning styles and different needs. In composition courses especially, it is improbable that any single strategy will make any change at all.

The teaching strategy of using individualized projects for this Practicum, included several factors which could affect student learning: the importance of allowing students to choose their own projects, the use of project check sheets, the use of small group work with peer evaluation, and the teacher in the role of manager of learning. All of these aspects must be considered in evaluating the affectiveness of this method.

A number of measured dependent variables showed improvement in both classes but no significant difference between the treatment group and the control group. Both groups showed similar improvement in attitude toward communication, and in mechanics, coherence, use of supporting detail, transitional devices, and logic. This would indicate that the traditional method of teaching composition and the individualized project method were

equally effective. This is in accord with previous research done in college classrooms. In a review of research on college teaching, McKeachie (1970:13) reports, "So far as performance in course examinations is concerned, there is no strong basis for preferring one teaching method over another."

The treatment group did show significantly more improvement in fluency, the ability to write more in the same period of time. The value of quantity in writing may be questioned by those who would prefer to emphasize quality. However, fluency has many advantages according to Robinson (1972). Robinson reported in a workshop for Miami-Dade Community College English faculty that fluency in writing would increase the students' confidence and improve their ability on essay tests or in other situations where writing quickly is important. The improved fluency of the treatment group could be due to the frequency of in-class writing and/or to the fact that the projects all required much more writing than any single essay written by the control group.

Another area in which the treatment group was significantly different from the control group was in attendance. The treatment group had an average of 1.3 absences per student and the control group had an average of 4.1 absences per student for the term. Although attendance was not stressed more in one class than another, students in the treatment group were more involved in class participation because of small group work and because everything that happened in class was related to their projects.

In terms of measurable results, better attendance and more improvement in fluency would recommend the individualized project method of teaching composition as a way of improving student motivation. The students' comments about their projects at the end of the course indicated a high degree of enthusiasm and involvement and reflected the personal responsibility for learning which they had shown throughout the term.

Another reason for recommending the project approach would be the saving in teacher time. Students are more active in helping each other and evaluating writing. Less time is spent by the teacher in grading and correcting papers. Evaluation is easier because the Project Check Sheet provides a guide. This allows the teacher more time for helping individual students find the information they need, and giving individual feedback.

This writer would recommend the individualized project method as an approach to teaching composition for these reasons. However, many modifications could be made. The advantages of the check sheet (pre-planning commitment) or the peer group work could be incorporated in many different strategies. The individualized project could be shortened and used in conjunction with traditional essays or other types of assignments.

The main recommendation would be to individualize instruction in composition classes in the community college, whether it is done through an individualized project or some other way. Part of the recommendation to individualize would include some sort of plan, contract, check sheet

or other form of commitment on the part of the student. When the students commented on how they felt about their projects (see Appendix G), they often commented on (1) their feelings of pride and ownership and delight in their abilities and accomplishment, (2) their enjoyment of choosing their own topic, and (3) surprise at how much they accomplished or how much work they did. The importance of these comments is that they chose what they were going to do. All the credit was theirs. If they weren't interested they could blame no one else. If they worked a lot, it was because they were committed to doing a lot of work.

In addition to recommending individualization with an emphasis on student commitment, this writer would recommend that English composition teachers try more alternatives. The research that has been done in composition, including this Practicum, indicates that student writing is not affected much by methods or by hours of careful paper correction on the part of the teacher. English teachers could be less driven in their planning and correcting, and let the students learn more and be responsible for their own planning and correcting.

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APPENDIX B

GOODMAN COMMUNICATIONS ATTITUDE QUESTIONNAIRE

This is an evaluation of how you feel about communicating. It will not affect your grade in the course. Honesty is the key. Bubble in the appropriate number on the IBM card.

1. I am willing to express my ideas and feelings verbally to other class members.

   (1) really not willing (2) not very (3) somewhat (4) fairly willing (5) completely

2. I am able to think through and prepare an essay with which I am pleased.

   (1) really not at all and certainly not with pleasure (2) with difficulty (3) somewhat efficiently (4) fairly efficiently (5) most efficiently

3. I feel aware of and can readily accept the attitudes, feelings, needs and goals of others no matter how much they differ from mine.

   (1) hardly at all (2) not very (3) somewhat (4) fairly well (5) completely

4. Because I have something worthwhile to communicate, I desire to communicate in writing my feelings and ideas.

   (1) hardly at all (2) very little (3) somewhat (4) quite a lot (5) very much

5. Because I know I have something to say, I want to express my feelings and ideas verbally.

   (1) not really (2) once in a great while (3) somewhat (4) fairly much (5) enthusiastically and often

6. I feel proud of my ability to order and structure my essays in a clear, logical pattern.

   (1) I don't really trust myself to do this (2) not very proud (3) somewhat proud (4) fairly proud (5) very proud

7. I am eager to read my essays aloud in class.

   (1) definitely not (2) no, too risky! (3) somewhat eager (4) fairly eager (5) very eager

8. I am looking forward to taking another English course now.

   (1) not at all but I guess it's required (2) not much (3) somewhat (4) fairly much (5) very much

9. In terms of my ability to use language, I feel quite able.

   (1) almost never (2) once in a great while (3) sometimes (4) quite a bit (5) most of the time

10. I have confidence in my ability to communicate.

(1) almost none (2) very little (3) somewhat (4) fairly strong (5) very strong

---

This part of the questionnaire is an evaluation of how you feel about free and open communication in a group.

When working as a group member, I

11. want to attend and keep up with group effotts.

(1) almost never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always

12. enjoy contributing effectively to group discussion.

(1) I find it hard to do this at all (2) very little (3) somewhat (4) usually (5) always

13. vocally support another member's right to present his/her views even though that view may be unpopular and even though I may not have anything specific to add.

(1) never risk doing this (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) frequently (5) always

14. when appropriate ask for constructive feedback from others and risk offering constructive feedback to others.

(1) never risk doing this (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) often (5) always

15. understand and can apply in group work the concepts of feedback and process.

(1) really not at all (2) very little (3) somewhat (4) fairly well (5) completely

16. am interested in learning and growing with the group.

(1) I never show much interest because I have nothing to contribute in such a situation (2) I am often afraid and uninvolved in groups (3) I sometimes have a spark of interest (4) I'm often interested (5) I'm always interested and involved

17. when appropriate, take a stand on an issue and defend my position logically.

(1) rarely trust myself this much (2) seldom (3) sometimes (4) often (5) always

18. after lengthy discussion and having defended my viewpoint, am willing to compromise for the good of the group.

(1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always

19. feel free to risk sharing experiences meaningful to me with my group members.

(1) never (2) rarely (3) sometimes (4) usually (5) always

20. try to draw out quieter members of the group and make them feel at ease.

(1) I don't do this because I see myself as one of them (2) rarely
(3) sometimes (4) often (5) always

Add any comments there that you would like to make about your attitude toward communication and/or this questionnaire.

APPENDIX C

IN-CLASS ESSAY

Choose one of the following topics and in the next fourty-five minutes develop it into an essay, according to your idea of what an essay is. Do the best job that you can (although this will not affect your grade in the course) and allow enough time for proofreading and correction. You do not need to rewrite the essay, but do correct as many mechanical errors as possible. You may want to double space so that you have room for revisions.

People are animals.

People should be more selfish.

The age of Aquarius is a reality.

I believe in _____.

I'm always glad when _____.

I was so mad when _____.

I will never again _____.

I wish I could _____.

More than anything I want _____.

If only I could stop _____.

When I have children of my own _____.

I'm totally opposed to _____.

I wish people would _____.

I often think about _____.

I'm really interest in _____.

I think teachers should _____.

The government is _____.

I am happiest when I _____.

APPENDIX D (From Joint Statement on Freshman English by the Departments of English of Ball State Teachers College, Indiana State Teachers College, Indiana University and Purdue University.) 49

SUGGESTED GRADING STANDARDS IN FRESHMAN COMPOSITION

	CONTENT	ORGANIZATION
Superior (A-B)	A significant central idea clearly defined, supported with concrete, A-complete, B-substantial and consistently relevant detail.	Theme planned so that it progresses by clearly ordered and necessary stages, and developed with originality and consistent attention to proportion and emphasis; paragraphs coherent, unified, and effectively developed, transitions between paragraphs explicit and effective
Thesis Statement - Short, Clear, Pointed	Length depends on logic - for thought psychological - for audience	
Average (C)	Central idea apparent but trivial, or trite, or too general; supported with concrete detail, but detail that is occasionally repetitious, irrelevant or sketchy	Plan and method of theme apparent but not consistently fulfilled; developed with only occasional disproportion or inappropriate emphasis; paragraphs unified, coherent, usually effective in their development; transitions between paragraphs clear but abrupt, mechanical, or monotonous
Unacceptable *(I-W)	Central idea lacking, or confused, or unsupported with concrete and relevant detail	Plan and purpose of theme not apparent; undeveloped or developed with irrelevance, redundancy, or inconsistency; paragraphs incoherent, not unified, or undeveloped; transitions between paragraphs unclear or ineffective

*If grade is I, determine whether final grade is to be earned through a DIS project or ENG 280.

	SENTENCE STRUCTURE	DICTION	GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING
(A-B)	Sentences skillfully constructed (unified coherent, forceful, effectively varied)	Distinctive: fresh, precise, economical and idiomatic	Clarity and effectiveness of expression promoted by consistent use of standard punctuation and spelling
(C)	Sentences correctly constructed but lacking distinction	Appropriate: clear and idiomatic	Clarity and effectiveness of expression weakened by occasional deviations from standard grammar, punctuation and spelling
(I-W)	Sentences not unifed incoherent, fused incomplete, monotonous or childish	Inappropriate: vague, unidiomatic, or substandard	Communication obscured by frequent deviations from standard grammar, punctuation and spelling

PROJECT CHECK SHEET

1. What is the topic of your project?

   What is the title of your project?

2. What is the thesis of your project? (This must be a complete sentence which expresses your central idea.)

3. Who would be your ideal audience if you could show your project to anyone you wished?

4. What is the purpose of your project? That is, what effect do you want to have on your audience? (The most frequent purposes are entertainment, information, and persuasion.)

5. How will you get the details, information, material, etc., for your project? What will be your sources of information? What will be your plan of action? This might include reading books or other material, interviewing people, watching movies or T.V., and many other possibilities.

6. What will be the final form of your project? Examples are research paper, critiques of literature or other art, journal, slide/tape presentation, movie, T.V. script, creative writing.

   Why did you choose this form?

7. How will you organize the details of your project? Outline the ideas you hope to present.

8. What criteria do you want your project to be judged by?

Student Opinion of Teaching and Course[1]

W. J. McKeachie

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE *TEACHER* AND THE *TEACHING*

Each of the items below deals with a characteristic of instructors which students feel to be important. Indicate your rating of your instructor by a check at the appropriate point on the scale. The exact point at which you rate is less important than the general impression.
Write in after the question any additional comments that you wish to make. Give examples wherever possible.

---

1. Is he actively helpful when students have difficulty?

NOT HELPFUL — ACTIVELY HELPFUL

Example or Comments:

2. Does he appear sensitive to students' feelings and problems?

UNAWARE — RESPONSIVE

Example or Comments:

3. Was he flexible?

RIGID — FLEXIBLE

Example or Comments:

4. Does he make students feel free to ask questions, disagree, express their ideas, etc.?

INTOLERANT — ENCOURAGES STUDENT IDEAS

Example or Comments:

5. Is he fair and impartial in his dealings with the students?

UNFAIR — FAIR

Example or Comments:

6. Is his speech adequate for teaching?

UNINTELLIGIBLE — GOOD

Example or Comments: (Volume, Tone, Enunciation, Rate, Vocabulary, etc).

7. Does he belittle students?

BELITTLES — RESPECTS

Example or Comments:

8. Does he tell students when they have done particularly well?

NEVER — ALWAYS

Example or Comments:

9. Does he dwell upon the obvious?

DWELLS ON OBVIOUS — INTRODUCES INTERESTING IDEAS

Example or Comments:

10. Is he interested in the subject?

SEEMS UNINTERESTED — SEEMS INTERESTED

Example or Comments:

11. Does he use enough examples or illustrations to clarify the material?

NONE — MANY

Example or Comments:

12. Does he present material in a well-organized fashion?

DISORGANIZED — WELL-ORGANIZED

Example or Comments:

13. Did he follow an outline?

NOT AT ALL — VERY CLOSELY

Example or Comments:

14. Does he stimulate thinking?

DULL — STIMULATING

Example or Comments:

15. Does he put his material across in an interesting way?

DULL — VERY INTERESTING

Example or Comments:

16. Other important characteristics—Please specify:

17. Considering everything how would you rate this teacher? (Circle your rating).

EXCELLENT — VERY GOOD — GOOD — FAIR — POOR — VERY BAD

Now go back over the list and place a check (✓) before the five items which were most important to you in making your judgment.

---

[1] This form or items from it may be used without obtaining permission from W. J. McKeachie.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COURSE

1. Are the objectives of the course clear?

Example or Comments:

2. Is the amount of work required appropriate for the credit received?

Example or Comments:

3. Was the assigned reading difficult?

Example or Comments:

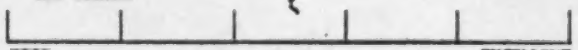
4. Are the tests fair?

Example or Comments:

5. Are the grades assigned fairly?

Example or Comments:

6. How would you rate the contribution of the textbook to the course?



Example or Comments:

Considering all of the above qualities which are applicable (including others that you added), how would you rate this course? (Circle your rating).

EXCELLENT VERY GOOD GOOD FAIR POOR VERY BAD

If you have any additional comments to make about the course or the teacher, please make them at the bottom of this page.

III. COMMENTS

APPENDIX G

RESPONSES TO THE SELF-EVALUATION QUESTION "HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR PROJECT?"

I have for a long time wanted to be in a learning program. Now I'm here, I feel that it's a dream come true. I feel great about my project! English is one of the reasons I was afraid of college. Now that I know that I can research and arrange and get a good grade. WOW!

I'm satisfied with my grades and project because I learned to correct errors. I communicated more with other students than in any other class because of the project.

I really wasn't pleased with my project because I wasn't able to do more than get information from books. I meant to use other sources but due to my class load I didn't have time.

I couldn't wait to present my project in class.

I'm very satisfied with my project. This was my first term paper. I didn't know how to write one before.

I liked being able to spend all my time on one big assignment instead of a lot of little ones.

Everyone liked my project but I guess I am never satisfied. I wanted to do so much more than I did.

My group was very helpful to me and so was the teacher. I feel like my project belongs to everybody. Having a chance to get help seems more real to me than always working by yourself.

For once I am going to keep something I did as an assignment.

I liked doing my project because I felt like I could work at my own speed and yet be part of the group in class. It always takes me a long time to think about what I want to do so having a whole term was good. This is the best I have ever done in school because I had time to do it like I wanted to.

I feel great! After reading the responses of the class I feel I fulfilled my purpose of getting my point across and providing good entertainment.

From the start I did not like the idea of doing a presentation in class but when I got the slides ready it started to seem like a good idea and I got excited about it.

I liked it but I think I could have made it better if I just had more time.

I think my project showed a problem and a need to do something about it. I put a lot of time into it and I hope it showed.

I wish I had picked a different subject but I put a lot of work in it and I think it is pretty good.

I don't believe I did the whole thing!

I'm proud of it and surprised at how much I improved.

I feel the relief that comes after exhaustive concentration.

I dug it because I was able to show my feelings and be entertaining.

I enjoyed working with it although I got myself in a bind and didn't know which road to take. I wish the semester was just starting instead of over.

My project was a constant learning process for me and I'll always be interested in the subject now.

The project took me into a completely new area which I had to master on my own. I was very pleased with the finished product.

I loved it because it was all mine from beginning to end. I feel like a God! Thank you.

I thought my project was good I enjoyed doing it and learned a lot but I still wish I could have done more.

I'm proud of myself and the people who encouraged me to undertake such a big job.

I feel I learned things I would not have learned any other way but it was so much work I wouldn't want to do it again.

I've never spent so much time and energy on anything. I really got involved.

I think it prepared me for future college work and I was able to apply everything we learned in class.

The project I did was interesting to me. It's the first time I could do whatever interested me.

I was not completely satisfied because it could have been much better so I did some extra work.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

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